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Saskatchewan premier says 80 per cent of Regina's COVID-19 cases are people under 50

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Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe takes a tour of the COVID-19 mass immunization clinic and drive-thru immunization space at the International Trade Centre in Regina on Feb. 18, 2021.

MICHAEL BELL /THE CANADIAN PRESS

Saskatchewan's premier says people under the age of 50 make up the majority of active COVID-19 cases in the Regina area which is battling a spread of more infectious virus strains.

Scott Moe told a radio talk show that 80 per cent of the city's more than 700 active infections are in the under-50 age group.

"It is people my age and younger. We just need to be especially diligent," Moe, 47, told the host Wednesday.

Health officials have said the variant known as B.1.1.7 and first detected in the United Kingdom is likely to have taken over from the original novel coronavirus, and is up to 70 per cent more transmissible.

Of Saskatchewan's 954 variant cases, 824 have been found in and around the capital.

The Regina area has had about 100 new cases daily reported in its health zone over the last few days, including on Wednesday when 116 new infections were detected.

Saskatchewan's overall total of new cases was 190 and the seven-day average was 173, up from 138 early last week.

There were 147 people in hospital with COVID-19, with 22 patients in intensive care.

Experts have linked variants to more severe illness among younger patients and more of them in intensive care units.

To reverse the Regina area's rising case numbers, Moe announced Tuesday that after weeks of refusing to tighten existing public health measures, he would restrict restaurants and bars in and around the city to takeout and delivery service starting Sunday.

"This is exactly what I didn't want to do," the premier said Wednesday.

To help the industry, the Saskatchewan Party government announced it is temporarily capping food delivery fees applied by third-party providers from Sunday until the end of April.

It says fees will be capped at 18 per cent of a customer's bill, before taxes, if an order is delivered and at 10 per cent if it is pick up.

Other indoor event venues in Regina and surrounding communities also have to shut their doors until at least April 5. People are no longer allowed to have guests in their homes.

An advisory has been issued for people to avoid travelling in and out of Regina. The city has said that starting Sunday its community and recreational centres will be closed.

Regina Public Schools and the Regina Catholic School Division are moving students to online learning ahead of spring break because of the variant spread.

Households outside of Regina can still enjoy loosened public health rules. Up to 10 people can gather inside a home and worship services are allowed for up to 150 people, or 30 per cent capacity, whichever is less.

To date, around 151,000 vaccinations have been done in the province. The Saskatchewan Health Authority says residents 65 and older can book a shot, which it says will drop to 62 starting Thursday.

People also eligible for the vaccine include those living in the Far North aged 50 and older, priority health-care workers, and those with underlying health conditions or deemed to be medically vulnerable.

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